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## ALEX SKOLNICK

Thrash To Jazz And Everything In Between

Story: Gail Flug

**G**uitarist Alex Skolnick leads a double life. An apprentice of Joe Satriani, he joined Bay Area thrashers Testament in his late teens. Their albums – 1987's *The Legacy*, 1988's *The New Order* and 1989's *Practice What You Preach* – didn't sell millions, but earned the respect of the thrash community, and Skolnick's multifaceted playing certainly helped.

Eventually, though, he felt limited by their direction, and had a jazz epiphany. "I saw Miles Davis on TV in one of his electric bands, and that incorporated funk and world music," Skolnick reflects. "I wasn't aware at the time that it was jazz." He was also soon beguiled by the musicality and skill of Al DiMeola, Branford Marsalis, Thelonious Monk, and John Coltrane.

Skolnick recorded two more Testament albums – 1990's *Souls Of Black* and 1992's *The Ritual* – before leaving the band, diving briefly into Savatage, then exploring other musical styles with side projects. Then he relocated to New York City to study jazz and contemporary music at the New School.

"A lot of legendary jazz musicians teach there," he explains. "It was a place where I could get all my questions answered, by people who could care less that I played *Monsters Of Rock* and did an interview on *Headbanger's Ball*. There were a few students that didn't talk to me all year, and I thought they had attitudes or were jazz snobs. But by the end of the

term, they [admitted] they were afraid of me because they had seen me open for Slayer."

The guitarist began playing with fellow student and Testament fan, drummer Matt Zebroski, exploring Skolnick's idea to rearrange rock and metal songs into jazz-fusion. Adding bassist John Davis, the Alex Skolnick Trio was born, and unleashed *Goodbye To Romance* in 2001.

According to Skolnick, finding songs to jazz up is easier than you'd think. He seeks rock songs with "similar qualities of jazz standards, with a singable melody. The timing needs to fit, too. It needs to be made into a groove that can be improvised over it while still recognizable." He notes KISS's "Detroit Rock City" was easy, as the original was "sort of a rock version of a swing beat, and we made it a real swing beat. I always thought that the

guitar solo reminded me of a Latin flamenco progression, so I used that approach."

After his trio's second album, 2004's *Transformation* (with new bassist Nathan Peck), the original Testament line-up renewed their friendship and reunited for a 2005 tour, to the delight of thrashers worldwide. "People haven't forgotten Testament; in fact, we seem to have a bigger audience now," observes Skolnick. They have a new studio album in the works for Nuclear Blast for 2008. Meanwhile, his trio released *Last Day In Paradise* earlier this year, comprised mainly of originals. Not one to sit idle, Skolnick is also a touring member of the classically-influenced Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

"I always wanted my career to reflect my album collection," Skolnick states. "I always wanted to be able to jump on stage with almost anybody in my music collection." 🍌



The Alex Skolnick Trio:  
Making Jazz Bad-Ass Since 2001.